



EDITORIAL

PUMSAVANA KARMA IN AYURVEDA: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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All parents have a dream of begetting the healthy, intellectual and beautiful progeny; this is also evident from the reference of the word like “*Suputrakameeya*” in classics. The influence of diet, psyche and other routines of mother on the fetus has been talked since ages. Ayurveda describes simple methods to procure a healthy offspring and the planning of which starts from the selection of partner. These methods are popularized as ‘*garbha samskara*’ worldwide ^[1].

Pumsavana Karma is one of the *Shodasha Karmas* (Sixteen rituals) performed in various stages of life in ancient India. It deals with the technique of genetic engineering to ensure healthy progeny and to determine the sex of the child ^[2].

The practice of *Pumsavana Karma* is misapprehended among the Ayurvedic community that, it can be only practiced for getting the male baby. In some states of India such as Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra etc. many quacks misuse and malpractice in the name *Pumsavana Karma* and loot money from the people by giving false drugs.

Traditionally, it has been observed that there is a preference for sons in India. Various means to have a son include going through multiple pregnancies till a son is born, sex selective abortions, pre-conceptual techniques and post-conceptual intake of drugs to beget a male child. This has nationwide implications, especially for issues such as female foeticide and health care for the living girls ^[3].

Now it seems that because of the strong desire to have a son, people wish to exercise some choice regarding the sex of their children in their small family by resorting to sex selection techniques. However, troubled by the exponential rise in incidence of female feticide the government enacted the PNDT Act (1994) to curb this practice ^[4].

Incidentally, the authors have anecdotal reports of an apparent increase in congenital malformation in the study area (as reported by private nursing homes). Whether this is true and whether such use of SSDs (Sex Selection Drugs) produces only hermaphrodites or whether it leads to some congenital malformation should

be the subject of further scientific inquiry. In addition, public at large, medical practitioners (both allopathic and Ayurvedic) also need to be educated on relevant aspects of this problem^[5].

I strongly condemn the views of Bandyopadhyay S, et al., as they don't have sufficient data to prove the congenital malformation in those consuming SSD's. All the herbs are used for *Pumsavana Karma* are safe and does not produce any fetal malformation if administered as told in the classics.

Apart from the getting the male baby, the other important benefits of *Pumsavana Karma* such as prevention recurrent abortions and for changing the color of fetus should be used judiciously in practice. The AYUSH Dept. should set standard guidelines for the practice of *Pumsavana Karma* with its primary and secondary indications. Govt. should consider amending the PNMT act (1994) for specific use of *Pumsavana Karma* in pregnancy by certified specialists (MS in Prasoothi and Streeroga) and also take care of misuse of *Pumsavana Karma*.

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